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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of fourteen members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 15 July 2016 from the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations presents its compliments to the President of the seventieth session of the General Assembly and has the honour to inform the latter that the Government of Japan has decided to present its candidature to membership in the Human Rights Council for the period 2017-2019 at the elections to be held in 2016 in New York (see annex). The Permanent Mission of Japan would be grateful if the candidacy of Japan could be included in the final document to be produced for the forthcoming elections and would also appreciate it if it could be circulated among the Member States.

Japan looks forward to playing an active role in concert with other States in the Human Rights Council, which is responsible for promoting universal respect for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, the Government of Japan has the honour to submit herewith a set of written pledges and commitments to the promotion and protection of human rights in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251.

* A/71/150.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 15 July 2016 from the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Japan to the Human Rights Council, 2017-2019

Commitments and pledges pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

I. Japan's human rights policies

Upholding the highest standards of human rights, enshrined and guaranteed in its Constitution, Japan has consolidated its democratic political system and has developed policies for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as universal values. Japan firmly believes that the promotion and protection of human rights is a legitimate interest of the international community. Therefore, grave violations of human rights need to be addressed in cooperation with the international community. Japan also affirms that the human rights of all people should be respected, regardless of their country's culture, traditions, political and economic systems and level of socioeconomic development, even if there are differences in their processes and speed of achievement with regard to human rights protection. Protecting human rights is the most fundamental responsibility of any nation. Based on its commitment to dialogue and cooperation, Japan will steer efforts to resolve human rights issues of concerns to the international community and to improve human rights situations through both multilateral forums, including the United Nations, and bilateral dialogues. In addition, Japan is committed to extending necessary and feasible cooperation from the viewpoint of human security. Japan is also committed to contributing to the realization of world peace, stability and prosperity more actively than ever.

II. International commitments and pledges for the promotion and protection of human rights

1. Conclusion of international human rights instruments and their continued sincere implementation

Japan has concluded the following international human rights instruments and has been committed to their sincere implementation, including the submission of government reports pertaining to these instruments:

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1979)
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1979)
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1985)
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1994)
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1995)

- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1999)
- The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2009)
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2014)

Japan has also concluded and faithfully observed the Geneva Conventions and the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

In 2014, Japan concluded the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction for protecting the interests of children.

Japan will continue to duly follow up on the recommendations it has received from the treaty bodies of these international human rights instruments in order to strengthen its cooperation with each body and its commitments pertaining to the implementation of each instrument.

2. Contribution to the efforts of the international community, including the United Nations

A. Active participation in the Human Rights Council

Japan has actively engaged in the activities of the Human Rights Council, including through the universal periodic review and a range of other opportunities so as to promote the improvement of the human rights situations of various countries and regions and find solutions to human rights issues. During its membership on the Human Rights Council from its establishment in 2006 until 2011, and again from 2013 to late 2015, Japan actively contributed to the Council's discussions and to the adoption of its key resolutions and thereby has shaped the opinion of the international community as follows:

(a) Together with the European Union, Japan has taken the lead in adopting the resolutions on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and has been making efforts to raise international awareness in order to improve the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including the abductions issue.

(b) Japan served as pen holder for the Human Rights Council resolution on the situation of human rights in Cambodia and has continued to support the efforts of the Cambodian Government to improve the human rights situation in that country.

(c) Japan led the Human Rights Council's adoption of resolutions and follow-up resolutions on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members.

In addition, Japan has actively engaged in the Council's discussions pertaining to improving the human rights situations in Syria and Burundi, enhancing the protection of vulnerable groups such as women and children, addressing sexual violence in conflict and tackling violent extremism.

Japan attaches great importance to the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the special procedures. Japan will

continue to offer its full cooperation to realize meaningful and constructive dialogues with thematic mandate-holders.

Japan will actively contribute to the activities of the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review. Japan takes the results of the 2012 universal periodic review process seriously and will voluntarily release interim follow-up documentation in 2016.

Japan remains committed to playing an active role in the discussions of the Human Rights Council review towards improving the work and functioning of the Council to maximize its efficiency and effectiveness.

B. Contribution to the work of the General Assembly and other forums

Japan will continue to participate actively in the work of the General Assembly and other forums, exercising leadership in areas such as human security, women's empowerment and disaster risk reduction as follows:

(a) Japan advocates and promotes the concept of human security. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is regarded as a people-centred agenda, which reflects the principle of human security. Japan will continue its engagement for the realization of human security.

(b) Japan will lead the discussions on the participation and protection of women. Japan underscored the importance of Goal 5 during the negotiations towards the 2030 Agenda. Japan proactively contributes to the discussions at the Commission on the Status of Women. In 2015, Japan established its national action plan in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). In addition, Japan hosted the World Assembly for Women in Tokyo for two consecutive years (2014 and 2015) on the themes "Women and the Economy" and "Global Issues" respectively. Last year, 145 world leaders gathered for the World Assembly for Women 2015 and, together, they increased momentum towards the realization of "a society where women shine". Japan will host the World Assembly for Women again in 2016.

(c) In March 2015, Japan hosted the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. The conference adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which serves as the new international guideline for disaster risk reduction. A total of 142 countries, including Japan, jointly proposed the establishment of 5 November as World Tsunami Awareness Day, and a resolution to that effect was adopted at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly at its seventieth session in December 2015. Japan will put into place broader and more people-centred preventive approaches to reduce natural disaster risks.

(d) During the negotiations towards the 2030 Agenda, Japan underlined the importance of eliminating violence against children (target 16.2).

Japan will continue to contribute to the promotion of the Security Council's agenda for the protection of civilians, particularly with regard to sexual violence in conflict and children and armed conflict.

3. Promotion of bilateral dialogue

Japan, recognizing the importance of dialogue and cooperation based upon the principle of mutual understanding and respect, has held regular bilateral dialogues and consultations on human rights with the Governments of more than 10 countries.

Japan will continue to hold interactive dialogues on human rights with various countries and make efforts to contribute to each country's efforts to solve human rights issues through the sharing of best practices and other means.

4. Development cooperation

In February 2015, Japan established the Development Cooperation Charter. Setting forth human security as a guiding principle and identifying "no one left behind" as a basic policy, the Charter outlines Japan's commitment to provide cooperation by protecting and enhancing the capabilities of each person, focusing in particular on vulnerable groups, including children, women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, refugees, internally displaced persons, ethnic minorities and indigenous people. Based on this principle, Japan will contribute to improving human rights situations through the following concrete efforts:

(a) In 2014, Japan provided development assistance in the health sector in the amount of $527 million. Japan makes active contributions for the achievement of universal health coverage. Japan will continue to promote universal health coverage and implement the Sustainable Development Goals in accordance with the Basic Design for Peace and Health, established in September 2015, and the G7 Ise-Shima Vision for Global Health, established in May 2016.

(b) Japan has pledged and is steadily implementing $3 billion of official development assistance (ODA) over three years, from 2013, towards women's empowerment, including in the areas of health, education and agriculture. Japan has also pledged to implement more than 42 billion Japanese yen of ODA over three years, from 2015, to contribute to making quality education accessible to women and girls.

(c) In the education sector, in addition to the above, Japan unveiled the Learning Strategy for Peace and Growth to provide a vision for realizing quality education through mutual learning.

(d) In the area of disaster risk reduction, Japan has pledged and is implementing financial cooperation in the amount of $4 billion and training for 40,000 people in disaster risk reduction and reconstruction over three years, from 2015, under the framework of the Sendai Cooperation Initiative for Disaster Risk Reduction, announced at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, in March 2015.

(e) Japan contributes to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities by, inter alia, promoting their social participation and the construction of barrier-free facilities.

(f) Japan contributes to peacebuilding by providing electoral assistance, supporting the social reintegration of former combatants and developing institutions, among other measures.

(g) Japan actively collaborates with and contributes to the activities of relevant international organizations whose activities lead to the protection and promotion of human rights, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Japan has increased its contributions to UN-Women by more than ten-fold in the two years since 2013. Japan will continue to support these international organizations, including through voluntary contributions.

III. Promoting human rights in Japan

In line with the obligations stipulated in the international human rights instruments to which Japan is a party, all relevant ministries and agencies will engage in the promotion and protection of human rights in various fields. Japan will continue to enhance its dialogue with civil society, including non-governmental organizations, and to implement the policies and measures in the following areas in order to enhance the protection of vulnerable groups:

1. Gender equality

Realizing "a society where women shine" is one of the Government of Japan's priorities. In December 2015, the Cabinet approved the Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality. This plan consists of four policy fields, 12 individual areas for the implementation of the plan and 71 numerical targets. The Plan emphasizes the need for a range of actions, including reforming male-oriented working styles, expanding women's participation in all fields of society and enhancing measures to eliminate violence against women.

2. Rights of persons with disabilities

In the lead-up to its conclusion of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014, Japan revised and enacted several pieces of domestic legislation, taking into consideration the views of persons with disabilities. The legislation includes the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities [revised], the Act on Comprehensive Support for the Daily and Social Lives of Persons with Disabilities [enacted], the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities [enacted] and the Act for Employment Promotion, etc. of Persons with Disabilities [revised]. Japan will steadily execute measures in line with these laws while upholding the principles of the convention.

3. Rights of the child

Japan will steadily implement the Third Comprehensive Measures to Eliminate Child Pornography, approved in July 2016, as well as the Act on Regulation and Punishment of Activities Relating to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and the Protection of Children, amended in 2014, which includes regulations on the simple possession of child pornography.

Japan will comprehensively advance measures to end the cycle of poverty based on the establishment of General Principles of Policy on Poverty among Children.

4. Rights of elderly persons

Japan has required companies to introduce a system that permits all persons who wish to work until age 65 to do so, pursuant to the Act for the Partial Revision of the Act on Stabilization of Employment of Elderly Persons, which entered into force in 2013.

To address the abuse of elderly persons, Japan urges residents to consult or report incidents of elder abuse to the relevant points of contact that municipalities have established in accordance with the Act on the Prevention of Elder Abuse, Support for Caregivers of Elderly Persons and Other Related Matters.

5. Rights of persons affected by leprosy

Japan engages in efforts to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and those who have recovered, bearing in mind its history of inappropriate measures taken in response to leprosy, including the quarantine of persons affected by leprosy. Japan appointed Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of the Nippon Foundation, who has wide recognition, a well-regarded reputation and extensive knowledge on this issue, to serve as Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of Persons Affected by Leprosy.

6. Combating trafficking in persons

Japan will continue to implement domestic measures and pursue international cooperation to combat trafficking in persons. In this connection, Japan revised its existing action plan and formulated the Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2014.

7. Indigenous people

Japan will continue to promote comprehensive and effective policy measures for the Ainu people, taking their views into consideration through various channels, including the Council for Ainu Policy Promotion.